



EVALUATION BRIEF

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Poverty Assessments: A Follow-up

Poverty assessments provide the basis for a collaborative approach to poverty reduction by country officials and the Bank. In evaluating their impact at the country level, OED found that more than half of the assessments do not state specific goals, address all three elements of poverty reduction (labor-intensive growth, human resource development, social safety nets), or include rigorous policy analysis. Country management and regional chief economists should increase their oversight of poverty assessments to ensure that they define clear goals and are of sufficient quality to provide useful inputs into country work.

- There has been a modest improvement in the proportion of poverty assessments rated satisfactory for economic quality—from 54 percent of those completed through 1994 to 63 percent of those done in fiscal 1996–98.
- Six out of seven stakeholders were generally satisfied with the poverty assessments, but viewed local partnership and consultation and knowledge transfer as the least satisfactory elements.
- Completion of poverty assessments is still subject to significant—some 50 percent—slippage.
- A much higher proportion of Bank staff than country clients are satisfied with most aspects of poverty assessments, including the treatment of rural poverty, methodological rigor, and coverage of the appropriate population groups.

Elements of Success

Adapt to Country Context. The country case studies demonstrate the importance of adapting the poverty assessment to country circumstances. A particularly successful case in this regard was Bangladesh, where overall receptivity to the assessment was greatly enhanced by its alignment with national goals and its support of ongoing country efforts to build capacity for poverty measurement and analysis. The assessment team

worked closely with the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), helping to collect poverty data, and also supported training programs to bring about changes in basic analytical methods used by government statisticians.

Goals: Specify, Clarify. Although two-thirds of the poverty assessments state their general goal—to assess the extent and causes of poverty and propose a strategy to assist the poor—about the same proportion fails to state specific

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goals. At the other extreme, the quality review found that when multiple goals are specified, they are seldom prioritized. This leads to the lack of clarity exemplified by a finding of the stakeholder survey: the majority of both Bank staff and country clients offered extensive lists of assessment goals for their countries, a list that few assessments were designed to achieve. Specific goals, in contrast, help to focus the assessment on the particular circumstances of the country in question.

Incorporate the Poverty Reduction Strategy.

Every poverty assessment need not give equal weight to all three elements of the Bank's poverty reduction strategy—labor-intensive growth, human resource development, and social safety nets—but the balance, or lack of it, should be justified. The quality review found that nearly half of the assessments do not address individual elements well or do not justify the balance among them. The Bolivia poverty assessment is an example of good practice: its discussion of promoting labor-intensive growth is thorough, and the relative weight accorded to each of the three aspects of the poverty reduction strategy is superior.

Conduct Rigorous Policy Analysis. About 59 percent of the assessments reviewed failed to conduct rigorous or meaningful policy analysis, and about 43 percent were found to be unsatisfactory in their use of qualitative/participatory work in policy analysis and the incorporation of the social, institutional, and political context. The Côte d'Ivoire poverty assessment makes good use of quantitative and qualitative methods to facilitate more robust policy analysis. For example, the qualitative work highlighted the increasing and dynamic participation of women in informal sector activities, and linked this to gender disparities in income and assets emerging from the quantitative data. It also indicated that women seemed able to take on new activities in the informal sector more readily than men who had been made redundant. The poverty assessment analyzed the problems of this increased burden of work and responsibility for women and the possibility that women might gain more influence and authority in family contexts as a result of their increased responsibility.

Dissemination and Follow-up. Achieving the maximum impact from a poverty assessment depends on the level of dissemination. The wide transmission of the main messages through a carefully managed campaign improves the chances of a healthy debate, later internalization of the messages, and their ultimate implementation. An excellent example is the dissemination programs in Azerbaijan. There was significant exposure in the broadcast media as well as in print. Two major workshops (both locally televised; one multi-audience) and several seminars were held for government officials using a translated version of the report. Missions held meetings with NGOs and donors. Logistical help from UNICEF facilitated wide coverage in local

papers. A website of the survey data is in preparation. Formal distribution of the report included the Finance Ministry, the Planning Ministry, sector ministries, cabinet members, donors, and numerous NGOs. The well-planned dissemination effort increased general awareness of the report and receptivity to its findings. In some other countries, dissemination was limited to a single workshop for a small group of government officials in the capital.

Purpose and Approach

Rather than focusing on the influence of poverty assessments within the Bank, this follow-up to the 1996 review looks at their impact at the country level as measured by the assessments' influence on the poverty debate, policy design and implementation, and institutional development. In keeping with the mandate of Operation Directive 4.15—that poverty assessment provide the basis for a collaborative approach to poverty reduction by country officials and the Bank, while effectively incorporating the goals of poverty reduction into the country's own efforts—four tools were used to gain a balanced view. These included country case studies, involving in-depth fieldwork in four countries to gain a detailed understanding of client perspectives; a stakeholder survey, an extensive survey of country clients, assessment task managers, and resident mission staff; a quality review, which examined the assessments from an economic perspective and in their social, political, and institutional elements; and a process review, to gauge the soundness of the process of preparing, disseminating, and following up on the assessments.

Client Consultation

An extensive survey of stakeholders, covering 81 country clients in 17 countries and 25 Bank staff, was carried out by the Gallup Organization to obtain stakeholder views about poverty assessments. In-depth fieldwork was conducted in four countries involving semi-structured interviews of a range of country clients to gain a detailed understanding of their perspectives on poverty assessments.

Recommendations

- ***Improve poverty assessment quality and process.*** The country management and regional chief economist's office should increase management oversight of the analytical quality of poverty assessments, as well as their partnership and consultation and knowledge transfer elements.
- ***Focus on setting goals and priorities.*** Country management should ensure that poverty assessments—from concept paper to completion—define

clear goals and priorities, provide adequate justification for prioritization of issues and for any selectivity in scope and coverage, adequately reflect country conditions, and link work programs and analysis to goals. The regional chief economist's office should monitor and provide quality control for these activities.

- ***Meet targets for poverty assessment completion.*** The Regions, in collaboration with the Poverty Reduction Board, must set realistic targets for completing poverty assessments and meet them. Senior management should provide the institutional inputs and incentives to produce quality poverty assessments—effectively and on time.

Interaction with Management

Management agreed with the general thrust of the report, noting that it provides useful information and insight, particularly on the feedback and impact of poverty assessments obtained through client surveys. Management emphasized that it had already taken a number of steps to enhance both the timeliness and the quality of poverty assessments, and that a more extensive program of action is under preparation, a program that will benefit from the recommendations contained in this report.